

# Surrey dialect

The **Surrey dialect** is a dialect of the English language that was once widely spoken by those living in the historic county of Surrey in southern England. The distinctive vocabulary of the Surrey dialect has now almost entirely died out and only few individuals still speak with a local Surrey accent.

The Surrey dialect is a subset of the Southern English dialect group. It was recorded by Granville W. G. Leveson Gower (1838–1895), of Titsey Place,<sup>[1]</sup> during the 1870s and first published by him in *A Glossary of Surrey Words* in 1893.<sup>[2]</sup> It was similarly spoken beyond the bounds of the traditional borders of Surrey in western Kent and parts of northern Sussex.<sup>[2]</sup>

Gower was first made aware of the dialect after reading a letter in a local newspaper. Following that, and after his own enquiries, he expressed a fear that improved transport and the spread of education would cause such local dialects to disappear and be forgotten despite the fact that, in his words, "Old customs, old beliefs, old prejudices die hard in the soil of England".<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Proverbs

The county was noted for its many agricultural proverbs. Some of the distinctive Surrey proverbs collected by Gower include:

- "*So far as the sun shone into the house on Candlemas Day, so far would the snow drive in before the winter was out.*"
- "*A fine Easter Day is followed by plenty of grass, but little good hay*" (meaning that the summer will be wet).
- "*Early thunder, late hunger.*"

A backward spring is thought to indicate a fruitful season ; the common people have this proverb : —

- "*When the cuckoo comes to a bare thorn. Then there's like to be plenty of corn.*"

The prejudice against a new moon on a Saturday found expression in the following doggrel: —

Surrey	
<b>Native to</b>	England
<b>Region</b>	Surrey
<b>Language family</b>	<div>Indo-European<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>West Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Anglo Frisian<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Anglic<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>English<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Surrey</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	—
<b>Glottolog</b>	<i>None</i>



Surrey shown within England

- *"Saturday new and Sunday full, Ne'er brought good and never shall."*
- *"So many fogs in March, so many frosts in May."*
- *"Christen your own child first"* (charity begins at home)

## Dialect syntax

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- The Old and Middle English prefix of "a-" is used generally before substantives, before participles and with adjectives placed after nouns, e.g., a-coming, a-going, a-plenty, a-many.
- Double negatives in a sentence are common, "You don't know nothing", "The gent ain't going to give us nothing"
- "be" is common for "are", e.g., "How be you?" is noted, to which "I be pretty middlin', thank ye" was the usual answer.
- Superlatives (+est) were used in place of the word "most", e.g., "the impudentest man I ever see"
- "You've no ought" was the equivalent of "you should not"
- "See" was used for saw (the preterite usually past simple) of see
- "Grow'd," "know'd," "see'd," "throw'd," and similar were however also used both for the perfect and participle passive of the verbs, e.g., "I've know'd a litter of seven whelps reared in that hole"
- Past participle takes more complex forms after common consonants "-ded," "-ted," e.g., attacked, drowned, "Such a country as this, where everything is either scorched up with the sun or drowned with the rain."
- The pleonastic use of "-like" denoting "vaguely", e.g. comfortable-like, timid-like, dazed-like, "I have felt lonesome-like ever since."
- "all along of" meaning "because"

## Dialect words

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- bait – an afternoon meal about 4 pm
- bannick – a verb meaning to beat or thrash
- baulky – is said of a person who tries to avoid you
- beazled – tired
- beatle – a mallet
- befront – in front of
- beleft – the participle of "believe"
- bettermost – upper-class people
- bly – a likeness, "he has a bly of his father"
- burden – a quantity
- comb – the moss that grows on church bells
- clung – moist or damp grass
- dryth – drought
- fail – a verb meaning to fall ill
- fly-golding – a ladybird
- foundrous – boggy or marshy
- gratten – stubble left in a field after harvest
- hem – a lot or much
- hot – a verb meaning to heat something up, "hot it over the fire"

- innardly – to talk innardly is to mumble
- leastways – otherwise
- lief – rather, "I'd lief not"
- lippy – rude
- market fresh – drunk
- messengers – small clouds (also called "water dogs")
- middlin – reasonable or average
- mixen – a heap of dung or soil
- mothery – mouldy
- notation – making a fuss
- nurt – a verb meaning to entice
- ornary – being unwell (the word means "ordinary")
- peart – brisk or lively
- picksome – pretty or dainty
- platty – uneven
- quirk – a faint noise indicating fear
- runagate – good for nothing
- sauce – vegetables, e.g. "green sauce", pronounced "soss"
- scrow – a verb to scowl
- shatter – sprinkling
- shifty – untidy
- shuckish – unsettled, showery weather
- snob – shoemaker
- spoon meat – soup
- statesman – landowner
- stood – stuck
- swimy – giddy
- the smoke – London
- tidy – adjective meaning good or well
- timmersome – timid
- uppards – towards London or in the north
- venturesome – brave
- welt – scorched
- wift – quick

Certain standard English words with nonstandard pronunciations:

*" Acrost for across; agoo for ago; batcheldor for bachelor; brownchitis (or sometime brown titus) for bronchitis; chimley or chimbley for chimney; crowner for coroner; crowner's quest for coroner's inquest; curocity and curous for curiosity and curious ; death for deaf; disgest for digest, and indisgestion for indigestion; gownd for gown; scholard for scholar; nevy for nephew; non-plush'd for non-plussed; refuge for refuse; quid for cud, " chewing the quid; "sarment for sermon; varmint for vermin; sloop for slope; spartacles for spectacles; spavin for spasms. I knew an old woman who was constantly suffering from "the windy spavin;" taters for potatoes; wunstfor once; wuts for oats, etc., etc."*<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

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1. <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1568.htm#i15675> Basic biography of Granville William Gresham Leveson Gower - The Peerage.com showing cadet branch of family of Duke of Sutherland - grandfather became sole heir to Gresham Baronets main estate, Titsey manor and Place.
  2. Davis, Graeme, *Dictionary of Surrey English* (2007), p.30
  3. Gower, Granville, *A Glossary of Surrey Words*, (1893), Oxford University Press
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